

[Recollections of a Pioneer]

Pioneer History From print (?) [??]

Febr. 14, 1925

Miller: L.L.

Recollections of a Pioneer

By C.L. Ray.

Forty years ago Nebraska was decidedly different from what it is now. During the latter part of August 1879, I had to stop at Hastings for a few hours and met an old acquaintance who asked me to come out to his ranch at the forks of the Republican where he was at work. Hastings was only a little town at that time, and it was only a block or two from the post office before one reached the open fields. The railroad run one passenger train each way then and the entire train consisted of only about two coaches. I told some one that I was going into tho cow country and the man to whom I was talking, a stranger from northern Illinois said he would rather go among Indians than among the cowboys.

I took the train to Red Cloud where we stayed over night, going on to Bloomington by freight the next day. This branch had been built to Naponee the year before but the trains did not run beyond Bloomington as a regular thing. C15 - 2/27/41 - Nebraska

At Bloomington we found a farmer boy who had been hauling wheat to market. We rode with him to Republican City, putting up at the Gage House for the night. The next morning we started on foot up the Prairie Dog for Oberlin. We had gone but a short distance when we came across a seventeen-year old boy who lived west of Oberlin and had been down to Mankato Kansas, to market some wheat. We rode with him to Oberlin. There were not

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many bridges on the Dog and not many houses to pass. What few there were, of course were built of sod. We reached Long Island that night. A new grist mill was being built there and only three or four houses comprised the town at that time. Horton was a town of about 200. Two miles west of Horton we camped for the second night.

The next day the boy took the divide south of the Dog to save a long detour by following the creek. We traveled all day without coming to a house or water hole where we could get a drink for ourselves or the team. We stopped at a dugout near the road, but were told that the settler had to haul water five miles and had none to spare for the team. However he gave us a drink for ourselves. When within three or four miles of [Decatur?] Center, we came upon quite a settlement which extended clear into town. This was quite small and was mostly of sod houses. Very fortunately, however, they had dug a well there 100 feet deep which enabled us to water our thirsty horses. We went into camp beside a straw stack near a hotel which was kept by a French woman.

Although it was only the first week in September there was a cold wind blowing so we piled straw around the wagon under which we made our bed for the night. The next day was Sunday and quite cold. We crossed over to Oberlin that morning. There was some corn on the creek bottom and evidently some one had been making free with it in true western style, for one man had posted a notice which expressed with much profanity the horrible fate of any one who took more of it. At that time Oberlin claimed a population of 200, mostly young men and women. It had been just a year since the Indians had gone through west of Oberlin and has massacred most of the men. We were told that forty-two had been buried in Oberlin after the Indians passed. The Indians had remained peaceful until they came to the Prairie Dog. The first one had forgotten, but who was on his way to the lad office at [?], two neighbor girls who were riding with him. They had seen Indians before and thought nothing of it, when suddenly the Indians shot the man and pulled the girls from the wagon.

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The proceedings were seen from a dugout about a half mile away where just a few minutes before a [cow-man?] from [Texas?] had gone for dinner. Immediately they blockaded the door of the hut. The Indians came and yelled and [?] all over the roof. One getting braver than the rest entered the passageway leading the door, when he was shot and killed by the cow-man. The Indians then left and spread up and down the valley, killing all males, over fourteen years of age, so I was told, and mistreating the women and children. At one house visited there were a mother and five children. The Indians were firing the bedding and throwing the children into the fire, when one Indian came in and said in perfectly good English, You let those children alone. I told you before we began this raid, I would have nothing to do with it unless you'd let the women and children alone." "Oh but didn't I feel good when I heard that," one of the girls said, when telling it later. Many of the settlers insisted that there were white men in the gang of Indians. One Indian, a fourteen-year old boy was left behind somehow. Two weeks later he was seen to crawl under a rock, where for two or three hours he kept off the enraged settlers with only a bone for a weapon. But they finally killed him.

At Oberlin we met three men, two of whose names I have forgotten.

The name of one of the men I believe was Keevan, and they were on their way up the Republican river on a Buffalo hunt. We rode along with them. The first night we stayed at Rawlins Center, which consisted at the time of about three sod houses. We stayed one night with a bachelor, who had a bed made of stakes driven into the wall on one side and supported on the other by stakes driven into the ground with brush for a mattress. This man told me if I lived in the country long enough I would learn to carry my bed with me, which I later found to be true, but at the time I thought perhaps he did not want to share his bed with me.

From Rawlins Center to Attwood was across the divide and no house was on the way. At the forks of the Beaver we found a tent and partly built store building, which I was told was Attwood. The town was later moved up the creek a mile and when I saw it two years

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later claimed a population of 200. Passing up the divide between the middle and south Beavers there were no settlers but we met a few would be homesteaders who had been out to take claims. And here we came to a laid out town, and a board nailed to a stake proclaimed the fact that it was Greenback City. The only inhabitants were the lot stakes and grasshoppers. It must have been near where McDonald now is. Thirty-five or forty miles west of Attwood we came to the sod house of George Dunn on the banks of the Big Timber. Here we camped for the night.

We had not been there long before two little boys came out of the plum patch near by. They said they thought we were Indians and had run into the bushes to hide. Dunn's sod house was on the old Wallace trail from North Platte to Fort Wallace.

The next morning we went north on the trail to the South Fork of the Republican. A cowboy who belonged to the "25" ranch, which was located in the bluffs near where the Benkelman high school is now located, happened along. John Anderson was the name of this first cowboy with whom I became acquainted. All of this country, and its ways were new [to?] me, but I did not see any of the dangerous things that had been pictured to me by my informant at Hastings. We found the cowboys generous and much more courteous in their treatment of women than the fellows who lived in "the states" as these westerners called the east. They considered it very discourteous to swear or smoke in the presence of ladies and one reason they gave for not wanting women around the ranch was the fear that they would swear in their presence.